

# Cardinal George Pell

Pennant Hills Golf Club

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007

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Thankyou Martin for those kind words of introduction; ladies and gentlemen I'm sure I'm able to say with most of you, perhaps all of you...brothers and sisters in Christ.

But I have for my sins for a while was in charge of a seminary where we trained catholic priests. And one of the more useful bits of information, or instruction, that I repeated fairly frequently to the trainee priests, to the seminarians, I used to say to them "when you're talking publicly for god's sake don't be telling people about your boring personal life – preach Jesus Christ" Now I'm going to break my rule and give you just a little bit of personal background because it will help to situate what I'm saying.

And it's not in every circumstance that it's ideal for me to explain my mixed religious background. And having done that I'll go on to say a few things which will probably seem to you to be completely obvious and natural but one little story I'll tell will demonstrate just how differently these basic truths, realities can be seen otherwise.

My mother from whom I received the faith was a.....she had a strong catholic faith and was a keenly practicing Irish Australian catholic...umm..her surname was Bourke. My Father was an Anglican; nominal Anglican; I remember once as a teenager I was filling in this census for him, and said..."what will I put down for you?...no religion"; he says "hell no, I'm an Anglican". He was a man of strong principles and a wonderful father to me. But he wasn't much interested in religion and obviously the name is English and umm, my first name is the same name as my father, and grandfather. I don't have a second name because in my father's family the tradition was the males would have as their second or third name 'Berkley'. And my mother felt I think that she had conceded enough to the protestant side of the family ...having me called George....that she wasn't...she balked at 'Berkley' and uh..I have no second or third christian names, as we used to call them. Now I,,,as Archbishop of Melbourne I (conceded) to see Gerry Adams when he was out here from the IRA. Interestingly enough nearly every advisor had said don't receive him...um....anyhow I thought generally t doesn't hurt to talk

and so will see him, and I did talk with him. And among other of the more useful things I was able to do once we got beyond the palaver on both sides..um...was to ask him....you know...some of the families of people who had been shot by the IRA had come to me and said that they would like to know where the bodies were buried so that they could pay them the proper respect...and umm...he took that on board and don't know if anything ever happened about it.

Incidentally ....then....after that, the consul, the British consul came to me and said "do you ever go to Ireland", and said "yes I do" and he said " if you went to Ireland would you do the rounds of the Church and political leaders there; just as a small contribution towards peace. I said " I'd be happy...course I'd be happy to do that if I could make the slightest contribution to bringing a bit of peace to such an unhappy place...I would be delighted to do so.

Before I get to the kernel of where I'm going.., when I came home from Northern Ireland I refused to say any word publicly about the situation, cause the only thing that was absolutely clear in my mind was that I didn't really know what was going on. But I didn't really understand the...what was happening underneath.

But to get to the kernel of this introductory little story I visited ..a heads of church... I visited a very senior protestant church leader there; and he said to me, he was obviously a sophisticated man who'd been out and around in the world..he said to me, "with your name and your background, and the fact that you're a catholic priest,,"..he said.."..how can you survive?" he said, "aren't you schizophrenic" um, and he was absolutely dead serious; and I said to him.." well I'm like many people who've been, whose people have been in Australia for three or four generations; I've got Irish, protestant and catholic, I've got English blood, and I've got one Scottish great grandmother." And I said that that sort of mixture is entirely taken for granted in the great majority of cases in Australia; and that's a great blessing. A great blessing. And people sometimes look at me funnily when I say, "well, you know, we should thank God that we're not like Northern Ireland." And especially younger people today..say that's absolutely ridiculous..of course we're not like that..we couldn't be. But it...um...we owe a lot to those Australians who have gone before us. For their good sense, the fact that they leave space...for others....and that they give space to a catholic minority. And we Catholics are very..ah..very grateful for that.

So for years, when I'd been to Ireland, I'd never been to Northern Ireland, I used to say that with my name pointing in one direction and my profession pointing in another direction I'd have both sides shooting at me. But,...we don't have that here.

Now I was of...my background, um, I grew up in an Irish-Australian cultural meillure, nearly all dad's relations were Catholics and we met regularly with them. I was much influenced by the published answers of Dr. Mannix; I grew up in the 50's; it was interesting, my mother's people revered him. In my grandparents home his portrait was in the main room, the dining room. My father's mother was very frightened of him, and he made her nervous. We were a family who were interested in politics, I was a teenager at the time of the Labour Party split, and it was a time when the cold war was at it's

height; the struggle against communism, and so for teenagers who were interested in things catholic and political; there were a whole range of great catholic archbishops and cardinals in central and eastern Europe who were very very brave in their opposition to, to communism, very outspoken. Minzenty in Hungary, Vizensky in Poland, Slipye in the Ukraine, Baran in Czechoslovakia. And so I grew up with men; hearing about men who were prepared to point out that Christianity has consequences for daily life outside worship, and Christianity has consequences for public life.

So Mannix would speak against sacaristic priests, priests who were only interested in worship; I'm very interested in worship, it's the centre of what we should be doing, and also he pointed out that at least the Catholic Church had been very slow to grasp the opportunities that are offered to Christians in a democracy. In other words, and this is...something...if you can remember one or two of the things that I say tonight; this is a very rudimentary thing but it is sometimes challenged by people with no religious background who might be aggressively secularist. If we are Christians, or if we're Callithumpians. But certainly as Christians we have as much right as anyone else in society to present our views for majority acceptance. Our people don't like it, they can say they don't like it, they can vote against it, they can reject it.

But we should never accept as the status quo, the suggestion that you can only speak publicly if you eliminate all religious perspective, or all religious truths. We Christians in a democracy have as much right as anyone else to present our point of view. And we've got to present it rationally, and we've got to present it in a way that we hope will be attractive to majority opinion.

Now I emphasize that as Catholic Archbishop I'm a religious leader, not a political leader. And I say that very seriously. Especially on the eve of an election. When the press would continually like me to say something political and I'm resolutely refusing to do that.

Now in the Catholic Church I do work for a unity on essential points of faith and morals. I make no apology for that; I think as a catholic bishop that's part of what I'm supposed to do. But I recognise that in a political life there is pluralism, a legitimate diversity of views. And it might mean that on the..the end point, for example, we might agree on that, we might disagree simply on the ways and means to that end point.

But there are a host of distant approaches and a host of different ways in which we might value different truths and different, ah, good aspects of society.

And I can give you just a couple of examples on the way people might, eh...where people might, eh...differ. For example theoretically you might drop the minimum wage so high so that unemployment would be radically reduced. And people might disagree amongst themselves as to just where the minimum wage should be, and just what sought of priority should be given to reducing the number of unemployed by paying lower wages. And so in conformity with catholic tradition in some of the recent changes I was worried that the minimum wage could be pushed too low. I don't like the fact that there is a great distance between the very rich and the very poor; but we've probably got to put up with that, but what we don't want is the poor getting

poorer. And you can get all sorts of other examples in which there can be and are legitimate differences.

I think coming from a catholic tradition it's a very useful distinction between clergy and laity. And generally the clergy should stay out of politics. In terms that...and not that...on occasion...and everyone has got the right to speak about the moral rights and wrongs of public issues that in terms of regular participation of holding office, holding political office, I think at least from a catholic perspective that's much better done by lay people than by religious.

So there's two new elements in comparison with the past and I might touch on that again as we move along a little bit; and that is the rise of unbelief and the rise of secularism. That means that our situation is significantly different from those trends were there, and significantly different from what it was earlier...earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> C and in the 19<sup>th</sup> C.

And many of the writers in the comentariat, many journalists write from an explicitly secular point of view. So often, they will work from the premise that all religions are the same; and they might all be equally dangerous, all equally useless, ah...but they're all the same. And that is not true at all. There are enormous differences for example between the great religions. You think of the social stratification of the Hindus. You think uh... say the attitude to violence, war, the position of women...in Islam. You think of the different traditions...well even within Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, the position of women is different. There is an enormous difference between the peace loving Quakers and say the middle ages, the military orders like the knights of Malta, or the Teutonic knights, the knights of the temple-the Templars; there are quite specific differences...differences there. And I might return to this briefly, of course life has been changed enormously by September the 11<sup>th</sup>; and by the now, the ongoing reality of minority Islamist terrorism. And of course even here in Sydney we have a significant number of Muslims, the overwhelming majority are of course very fine Australian citizens and working for peace as we are.

Now Martin when he introduced me, he quoted from something I said and that is about the persistence of religion. And this persistence is irritating people. And you've only got to think of people like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens they're very, very angry about it. They're like Jonah in the old testament; they're angry enough to die. Jonah was angry because God relented and didn't smite Nineveh. Atheist anger is a condition of its own and there might be several reasons for that.

But there's a disproportion about it, about this anger which makes one wary. Why be angry at an absence? And really, that's what they are. It leaves me to wonder if some atheists are angry with God precisely because he doesn't exist. You know how some children are angry with their father because he's always away, or he disregards them, or doesn't,...he treats them badly; wonder if...and if God is not there to give meaning to our lives, purpose and direction to our lives, where are we? And that's a serious and not just a rhetorical question.

John Paul Sartre, the atheist existentialist. One of the greats so they say, one of the greatest French writers of the 20thC. He was unremittingly honest at

least in some things; and he said for a person who is an atheist, the life of a solitary drunkard, and the life of a great statesman are equally worthless. I just had a rather cross letter from somebody because I pointed out that the two alternatives are blind chance or a creator God; and some fellow wrote to me very crossly, and said, you know they're not the alternatives, the alternative is Darwinian evolution, survival of the fittest. But underneath Darwinian evolution, the same option remains. Is it directed? Or is purposeless and directionless?

And religion here in Australia...., we're slipping, but not, not grossly. We're slipping in comparison of what we would like in terms of percentage of people who are Christian is down to 64%; it was 68% 5 years ago. The percentage at least of Catholics who practice regularly is declining, but we would have 21/2, occasionally 3 times as many people who would worship say at Christmas, especially at Christmas but also at Easter as we have during the week. We shouldn't underestimate our continuing religious strengths. And I think there's a real chance for revival and for growth.

Now what consequences does that have for secular democracy?

I don't think our presence as Christians and we're a majority provokes any great problems with most Australians at all.

But there is a change. Previously the tension was you might say between English and Irish pr protestants and Catholics and just a little bit before...Jim...Jim Barr was talking about his predecessor Tom Ruth at the Baptist church in Collins St. in Melbourne; how on Sunday during the 1<sup>st</sup> WW he would preach for God and King and Empire and the value of conscription and Dan Mannix on the Friday night before would have been preaching quite a different tune.

He said that they were good friends and they would occasionally get together socially to chat. And I have seen an envelope and legend has it that when Mannix put stamps on an envelope as a little sign of protest he would always put the stamp on its side. And I've actually seen an envelope with his handwriting where that takes place.

Now those ages are gone. And the significant tension in our society is between those who espouse a Judaeo-Christian point of view and there are significant differences amongst us but none the less we have a lot in common and those...and that increasing minority of people with an explicitly secular point of view. And they have got I think....will have consequences....concepts of social justice, consequences for the concepts of marriage sexuality and family, consequences on life issues-abortion, and increasingly the challenge will be euthanasia. I mean in a society that was absolutely radically dominated by secular monetarists, by secular economic drives; it's going to be much cheaper to euthanase people than to keep us oldies in the style to which we have become accustomed. So these different sorts of views have ...will have..ah...practical consequences.

But even if we look at the bad old days..., say from speaking from a catholic perspective, there were never centuries of persecution of Catholics here in this country and neither of course was there persecution of the protestant majority as there was in some countries overseas. No mob in Australian history has ever burnt a Catholic church. That can't be said in the United

States where quite a few....over the hundreds of years...., quite a few Catholic churches have been burnt.

There was a very colourful catholic archbishop...I'm not sure he was absolutely the 1<sup>st</sup> archbishop of New York, I think his name was Hughes. Ah, somebody suggested that before he became a catholic priest he ran a slave plantation or managed it ...I don't know whether he did or not, it sounds too good to be true but he certainly had a very forthright approach to things that happened in the early 1800's when catholic churches were being burnt...um..in different parts of the States. And he said that if a Catholic church in New York was touched, that New York would be a second Moscow; and the Russians had just burnt Moscow to the ground so that Napoleon couldn't come in and use it. So he brought 3000 or 5000 Irish American armed and put them around the old St Patrick's Cathedral and a couple more thousand of the boys there just in case things got really bad. There's nothing in our history approaching that. Nothing, and we should be grateful for that.

Most Australians don't have high theories of democracy....um...and I think we value democracy because it works because we're deadly serious about the right of every adult to vote for those who will govern us, and I think overwhelmingly we insist on the right to have our say. To the amusement of some people in Rome in the Catholic Church they receive a disproportionate amount of mail from Australia,... by Australian Catholics complaining about us Christians.

Now the reason for that I think is not that our situation is worse here, in many ways it's better than in many places; but Australians are used to having their say; they feel there's something wrong, they will say so. And if they can't get satisfaction here they will say it somewhere else and ..um..and that's basically a very, very good thing.

So I'm opposed to introducing in terms of the secular versus religious debate, I'm wary about introducing the much more developed anti-religious tendencies in the United States. United States is a much more religious country than we are, and it's much more anti-religious too. And I'm also...I don't think it's an Australian plant these suggestion and I urged earlier that Christians whatever our colour we have as much right to speak as anyone else.

For example in Britain just at this moment that view in practice which is almost totally ignored. The rule of thumb seems to be that Christian perspectives are systematically...systematically ignored.

So the separation of Church and State is something we very much adhere to, which doesn't mean to say we can't co-operate. And some secularist writers though that is absolutely necessary because for example Catholic archbishops are a danger to the democracy. Now I think any such ear is grossly exaggerated, but the separation of Church and State provides great protection for the churches, or us churches. So that the governments can't be imposing their way upon us and insisting what we might say and what we might not say.

It's interesting to here in Australia that people generally appeal to the separation of Church and State when they object to something that a Church leader, either a head of an agency, head of a church has said. But when ah...such a church leader says something with which they agree they are very silent on the advocacy of the separation of Church and State.

Neither is there much anti clericalism in Australian public life. And anti clericalism is a little bit less than it was. It was very strong in Catholic countries like Spain; you've only got to think of the Civil War and even Sapatero's government which is presently ruling in Spain and in Italy.

One of the important functions I think of religion especially for Christianity is for us to contribute to the maintenance of the development of what we might call social capital. The Australian concept of 'Fair Go', a Fair Go for everyone I believe is very difficult to imagine without a Christian background.

See, there have been many great societies in history where it would never enter their head to say that everyone should have a 'Fair Go'.

In the Roman Empire it looked...they suggested that about 40% of the roman population were slaves, who had no civic rights whatsoever.

In India you have the caste system,...people take that very, very seriously indeed. There's the 'untouchables'...

Now a fellow I studied with, an Indian, he's a 'tribal', so he's even lower than the 'untouchables', and he's now a Cardinal. Um....so he's quite a novelty in India. Not just because...there are 2 or 3 or 4 Cardinals in India but that a man who comes from the lowest of the low in Indian society could be one of the leaders in the Catholic Church is something that's ...er...counter-cultural there.

And of course in many parts of the world in the last century it was particularly the Christians who stood up and objected to tyranny.

I mentioned the Catholic Archbishops because I happen to know of them who were in opposition to communism, but during the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW whatever the rights, and whatever the church, the team leaders should have said more or less, overwhelmingly it was Christian people who took the Jews in.

The place where I stay in .....in Rome, when I go to Rome they had two or three hundred Jews in their cellars during the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW.

There is an atheist philosopher with a head full of mistaken ideas, I attended a banquet for Jonathon Glover; I attended a course of his lectures on ethics at Oxford years ago. He has said with the decline of religion. If religion, Christianity in the west declines radically, who will there be to oppose the tyrants? Because it's generally been the Christians with the depth of principles who are prepared to go out on a limb and take these stands on principle.

Christianity has made a great contribution towards producing strong individuals. And the other great source of that is strong family life.

Individuals who are community people in our sort of society overwhelmingly have a Christian background, or did have a Christian background and did come from strong families. And so its no coincidence that the totalitarians that we saw of the 20C, Nazism, and communism, and both of those moved

decisively against religion; especially the communists, and also against the family.

I feel that I've spoken nearly long enough; we're going to face all sorts of...ah...facing them already – challenges of marriage and family life and sexuality. But I think with persistence, and regular advocacy, I think we're well placed on at least quite a number of these issues to obtain majority support here in Australia.

Somebody was just saying to me people never really hear what you say unless you say it 6 or 7 times.

Now I'm not going to follow that principle tonight, but there's something in it. That if we keep explaining what we're doing, appealing to reason. It no longer cuts much ice with most Australians to say 'well we're espousing this because Christ taught it'.

But if we're able to say, 'well yes certainly we're espousing Christian teachings, but we're espousing them because they are good and reasonable, they are conducive to human flourishing'. They'll probably say, 'yes'. And because there's no such thing as common sense itself. There are a whole variety of common senses; different in Indonesia, different in India, different in Australia. Our common sense in many, many ways has been shaped by Christianity; and we should realise that and be grateful...be grateful for it.

I'll just conclude with a word or two about Islam. A few weeks ago at the end of Ramadan 138 Muslim scholars from around the world put out a letter to all the Christian leaders. It was the most Christian sounding Muslim letter I'd ever read. But it...they came from many, many countries. They were men of senior position and it was a real sign of hope. They pointed out the monotheism that we share. They claimed that together Christians and Muslims constituted about 55% of the population. I'm not sure that's true. It's probably closer to 40 or 45% but there's still a lot. And one of the things they said was that I we're not at peace; if Muslims and Christians aren't at peace, then it would be very difficult or the world to be at peace.

Occasionally people, good people in the Catholic church will suggest that Muslims are just like us, they're exactly the same as us, very similar to us. Um..., they're not.

Hey share many, many things with us. In many cases their religious practices are deeper and stronger, but their sole set of approaches to much of reality is somewhat different.

For example in a classical Muslim state there is no such thing as a separation of church and state. The concept of religious leadership is very, very fluid. They really don't even have a clergy, in a...in a technical sense. Certainly like the Catholic church does or like the churches of the Reform. And so therefore it's very important for us to be able to distinguish between those who are genuinely our friends and working for peace and tolerance,...and those few who might be quite different.

And I sometimes say to Catholic audiences, I say 'now we're a minority in Australia'. I gave a talk to a Muslim group and I spoke about the history of Catholics in Australia. And there's some parallel between the way...some parallel between the way the majority of Australians look on the Muslims



today, and the way the majority of Australians used to look on Catholics 100 years ago, or 150 years ago.

And at least this Muslim audience took some heart from that. I went out to Lakemba mosque for the breaking ... the end of Ramadan. And there were 100's if not 1000's of tough, self confident, young Muslim fellows about, and I remember just thinking almost subconsciously ...um! Abit scary.

And I thought that might have been the way the protestant majority in Australia used to look on the Catholics the way we got together to celebrate Christ the King. I don't know wether it was. But at least it's a possibility.

But I say to Catholics, 'we've been a minority, we are a minority, it's part of our job I think that other minorities like the Muslims get a fair run'.

I they get a fair run that is the best thing we can do to prevent the young males getting hostile and radicalised.

If we're unjust to them it will breed that hostility.

And if you'll excuse me I will finish by telling a vulgar story. It is an absolutely true story and I think there's a real point to it.

Because I was out at Lakemba where there's a lot.....speaking to the year 12's there. And there's quite a few Lebanese Christians, great friends of mine, I've got enormous admiration for the Maronite Christians.

And one of the year 12 boys said to me, he said...'now look- what are you getting out of all this talking with the Muslims? What's in it for us? What's the point of it? Isn't it just a waste of time that you're...eh'...cause he knew that I had spent some time in dialogue with them.

I said to this year 12 class and I lapsed again I told this same vulgar story, I said, 'look I was in Northern Ireland in Belfast, and I went down, I think it's Falls Rd, it's where the Brits put up a big high iron fence to separate the Protestants and the Catholics. And now of course you can go through it, but in one spot at least they'd left it there as a memento, and it is now covered with beautiful sayings; many of them are Christian, many of them are beautiful, some of them are quite sentimental. But there are two lines there that I am sure are written by an Australian.

Hey are unsigned, and I actually told this story in Northern Ireland and the people laughed a bit, but not as much as I think you would laugh. And those two lines read as such...

"Stop the shit, have a beer!"

Now I told this to the year 12,...to the yr 12 class out at Lakemba where a lot of them are Maronite, Lebanese Maronite, and you know they gave me a round of applause because they knew exactly what I was saying. And I think it's probably a good note on which to finish in case I tell another vulgar story.

*END*

*QUESTION RESPONSES*